

Burden (J. R.)

VALEDICTORY ADDRESS

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To the Graduates of the Spring Session 1850, delivered by the Hon. J. R. BURDEN, M. D., President of the College, at the Commencement held at the Musical Fund Hall on Friday, 10 o'clock A. M., July 19, 1850.

GENTLEMEN:—You have complied with the laws of the State of Pennsylvania which make the requirements of graduation a period of study of three years in the office of a respectable practitioner, the attendance of at least two full courses of medical lectures, and an examination separately by the Professors. The corporators have received official notice that you are worthy and well qualified, and have directed their President to confer upon you the Degree of Doctor of Medicine.

In this city, the first American School of Medicine was established, and although the number of students had only increased from 12 to 30 in the first fourteen years of its existence, Philadelphia has from that period been the capitol and centre of medical education—her diploma is esteemed the brightest in America.

The Philadelphia College, from which you this day receive your degree, possesses all the chartered privileges which the Legislature of the State has ever conferred on any medical institution; young as it is, standing the third in the number of its students, it yet ranks second to none for the professional standing, education, experience, and talents of its Professors.

The Corporators, acting under the laws of the land as Trustees for the community, and for the Medical Profession, will not permit a Professor to hold a chair in the College, unless he have knowledge and the faculty of communicating it to the class; favoritism, wealth, and family alliance, have nothing to do with the office. The sole requisites are character and mind.

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You have attained the object of your ambition, the diploma of this College, by close application during the inclemencies of winter, and the heats of summer; you have found by experience that the course is not a parade, but a fatigue duty; you realize what it is to pass the ordeal of the green box; you are living witnesses of the means of instruction and of the capacity of your teachers.

Gentlemen—you have received your commission to enter into the active service of life, your success but depends upon yourselves, on the correctness and firmness of your moral principles, on your fair and honorable deportment, on your knowledge, information and industry.

You have received *materials* for education; all that can operate on the mind through the eye and ear has been presented to you; all that teachers can do has been done, the rest remains with you, for no man is educated but the self-taught.

Permit one who no longer has a pecuniary interest in the profession, but who has loved and honored it through life, to make a few suggestions as to your future course.

If you have not learned the Greek and Latin languages, learn them. True, they are not indispensable as when they were the only written languages. True, that all the knowledge, and all that passed for knowledge has long ago been translated, that every thing which had been buried in the dead languages has been brought to light, with much perhaps, that might as well have been left in the tomb.

But the Latin and Greek furnish the materials for *word building*—the learned go to these as the architects of Greece and Rome go to the classic ruins for the materials from which to construct their edifices.

All the terms of science are Greek and Latin—all the new words which the progress of civilization compels men to make, are from these languages.

The modern languages, like the bank notes of local institutions, are only known in a limited neighborhood.

The ancient are like gold and silver, current every where in the scientific world, at home in every land, naturalized in every lan-

guage, fitting every department in science, interwoven in every page of our Profession.

Your medical reading has hitherto been wisely limited to the text books and notes of lectures, your reading in future will be more extensive, and your minds will be free from the tension of the student.

Of all that concerns your profession a few pages will record the truth, from the dawn of history until the seventeenth century. I am aware of the blind and indiscriminate respect that has been paid to ancient times—a fallacy, however, that is growing out of date. Antiquity is not the light of the world. The truth and not the age of fact, is what men have to do with.

Shall we go to hoary headed Egypt to be taught that the human body is divided into thirty-six parts, over which thirty-six genii preside, causing “all the ills that flesh is heir to,” and that the whole *Materia Medica* consists of one article, used now only by Macbeth’s witches?

Must we credit Father Hippocrates because he lived in the 80th Olympiad, that the arteries contain air and no blood, and doubt, in spite of our eyes and the dissecting knife, whether the veins arise from the heart, the liver or the brain.

Shall we believe on the same authority that animal heat is generated by a native fire *εμφυλον πυρ* kindled in the left ventricle of the heart, and that the auricles are a pair of bellows, to blow the breath and moisture from the lungs.

Plato, the sage, says the water we drink passes down the wind-pipe into the lungs.

Must we believe with Aristotle, that the muscles are the organs of sensation; the arteries organs of locomotion; that the only use of the brain, is to exhale vapors, and to act as a damper on the heat of the lungs and arteries.

That the food is boiled, stewed, or concocted in the stomach; that the liver, spleen and kidneys are mere cushions for the arteries and veins to rest upon.

Must we bow to the authority which so long controlled the human mind, for the sole reason that he lived 384 years before the

Christian era. Or because it was said of "old times" must we credit that the constellations acting on the four humours and eight qualities, cause 479,001,500 changes in the human body, all of which a Doctor must know and distinguish, in order to succeed in practice.

But for accuracy of observation and correctness of description the works of the ancients stand like the orders of architecture—simple, beautiful, imperishable.

Astronomy had a venerable mother, Astrology. Alchemy gave birth to Chemistry, and Medicine in such company, when Time was very young, could not go beyond the spirit of the age.

Modern Medicine dates from the commencement of the 17th century.

Before this period Philosophy was like the barren fig tree, rich in foliage but destitute of fruit. It was for puzzle, not for practical use. One of its objects to know "whether we can be *certain* of any thing, or be *certain* that we *are certain* of "*nothing*."

The object of modern Philosophy was to improve the condition and increase the happiness of man—to control matter by mind. Its effects are seen in the results of commerce, arts, manufactures; in all that is comprised in the term civilization. In that law of progress which is giving to the humblest individual more comforts, enjoyments and luxuries than were formerly possessed by the most powerful sovereigns.

In 1620, Bacon published his *novum organum scientiarum* and the girdled fig tree began to wither.

In 1628, Harvey announced the discovery of the circulation of the blood.

At this announcement, the medical world was in commotion all the Physicians who pointed to their gray hairs as unanswerable evidences of their erudition and skill, persecuted the daring innovator, the man who had brushed away at one fell swoop all their darling theories and time honored doctrines; they turned the current of popular prejudice against him and seriously affected his means of earning his daily bread. No man over 40 years of age became a convert to his opinions until 1690, when Malpighi and

Leeuwenhoek experimented with the microscope and saw the blood coursing the arteries.

From 1690, we have a period rich in advancement. Mind has been in motion in every department of knowledge, and medicine has been carried forward by the general impulse.

The worm eaten documents of antiquity have given place to the authority of Truth, and man confines his reasoning to what is known.

This period of only 160 years, full as it is of knowledge, you can make yourselves familiar with, by the exercise of industry and systematic skill.

Begin with the most modern books, as in Geography you begin with the latest maps; keep your note book for every department of your profession; consider each note book as a syllabus for a course of lectures. A few months judicious systematic reading will furnish you with the few truths spread in all garbs, through many volumes: expunge from their pages all borrowed matter and comparatively little is left to remember.

The subject of medical study, the human being, averages about 134 pounds in weight, occupies a few feet in space, and runs the course the Creator has appointed in three score and ten years.

By your diligence you have acquired a *brain* and a *finger* knowledge of his symmetrical organization; you have been taught the means and appliances to counteract and remedy diseases; reading, observation, study, and realizing the responsibility, will enable you to practice your profession with satisfaction to yourselves, and with safety to your patients. Do not confine your reading to your profession; learn all you can; the stream of improvement is running at a rapid rate.

Men begin to realize that their comforts, rights, peace and interests have a close, if not an inseparable connection with education, and the effort is making in this LAND OF HUMAN NATURE, to elevate man to the station for which God designed him, by the cultivation of his mental faculties.

The Physician who neglects education, will be behind the times—will commit a sin against intellect and against his interest.

Professional talent cannot be properly estimated by the community; but good sense teaches men, that he who is ignorant on matters of general or scientific knowledge is not likely to be well acquainted with his profession. The various branches of science are so interwoven, that to be familiar with one, others must be known.

How apparently unconnected with medical studies is the reading of voyages, yet such reading led to correct views of the process of nutrition—to a new era in medicine, and in human happiness, to the extinction of scurvy, a disease once frightful in its course and fatality, to the establishment of data, which enables nations to keep large fleets afloat for any voyage, which maintain armies of half a million of men in health.

Facts gained from the mariner have deprived the ocean of one of its dangers; have destroyed one of the terrible enemies of the tented field.

Even in civil life they have prevented blindness and deformity in children, and diminished to a great extent disease and misery and death in the public asylums for the poor and the criminal.

Do not suppose that in urging upon you the necessity of education I wish to alarm you with the difficulties to be encountered; on the contrary, all that is known can be acquired by well directed application and the exercise of common sense. Only *continue* the industry which you have practiced during your course in the College, and you will soon be masters of the field.

On a small part of the retina, the wharves, shipping and objects of a crowded city are accurately pictured; an area of miles on a few lines of the nerves' expansion, but the mind's eye has infinitely greater capacity.

It presents in pictures almost as vivid as life, all the great past. Century and Century at its command, stand side by side, on the same horizon.

Before it rise, distinct in lineament, all the mighty men who stand the land-marks of their times to after ages.

To the mind there is NO past, except the bright impenetrable veil which secures futurity, ALL IS PRESENT NOW.

All absorbing—all concentrating, its operations, thought, memory, distanced the lightning in velocity—obliterate time and space.

The more the mind is stored, the more room there is for treasures.

It solves the paradox "To him that haath shall be given."

Its results, its years of ripening may be communicated and understood in a FEW HOURS.

Such is the machine which God has given to man to surmount obstacles—to subdue matter.

So much for the learning and knowledge of your Profession. I urge it upon you because I wish you to succeed; I wish you to educate yourselves, in order that you may be ready to take any station in your profession. The true secret of success, is to be ready and qualified for advancement, and the general reason for keeping in the rear rank is, being unprepared for the van. Slumbering and sleeping and having no oil in the lamps, or not being ready when the angel comes down to stir the waters.

I have no respect for the young man who is contented with mediocrity, and I assure you that the highest honors of the profession are in your grasp, if you have the courage and industry to deserve them. I will not say "there is no such word as fail;" but in the unassuming and encouraging language of truth, "ask and ye shall receive, seek and ye shall find, knock and it shall be opened unto you."

There are points essential to success in practice, beside knowledge of your profession. I shall merely touch on them—they may strike you as small matters, still like small change, they may be useful in currency.

When you return to your friends do not consider yourselves better than your neighbors, because you are professional men. Remember that the only real title to respectability, is usefulness, and that respect will always be awarded to mental and moral character.

Practice all that constitutes politeness in dress, deportment and the intercourse of society—its robes are more effectual in protecting the person than the coat of mail. The principle of real politeness is "do unto others as you would be done by." Keep this in sight in all its applications.

Avoid volunteer practice, view it in the same light that the judge does volunteer evidence.

Never give your services to get the NAME OF ATTENDING THE POOR GRATIS—you are no more bound to attend for nothing, than the baker is to give away his bread to the hungry, or the merchant to give away his goods to the ragged. When you do attend for nothing, let it be on the holy principle of charity. Do not disgrace the profession or your heart by charging the poor widow or the female who works from

sun to sun for subsistence; but look for no other than the rich reward, the consciousness of doing good. Think not of the return of gratitude, and never expose yourselves by repeating what you have done, or of complaining of the ingratitude of the recipients.

If you attend a poor person gratis, you will seldom be called into the family of a rich and aspiring relative, and if the poor person become rich you are the last, probably, that he will employ. If you complain of this treatment, it will show that your charity is like sounding brass or a tinkling symbol. He who confers a benefit ought never to remember it, if he be wise and good.

Avoid taking public office with petty salary, when your employers are illiterate men—you put your character on the issue and lose or keep away the patronage of those who fear to be considered as recipients of public bounty.

Keep your money matters and your business to yourselves. If you say nothing you will be considered as succeeding, and the world will help you. If you talk about your practice, you will be suspected of being poor, and fare accordingly.

Avoid discussion at all times except in medical societies, on medical subjects.

In giving testimony avoid hearsay and book say.

Keep secrets, given to you as such, with more than masonic fidelity—tell them to none. Matters very trifling in your estimation, may be viewed as highly important by a patient. Take care to repeat nothing about your practice to any one.

Do not become what is termed a friend of the family with any patient; have the character of a physician, and that only. Hear as little as possible, and forget all you hear. Silence, tho' imponderable, is an immense power.

Your business is with the body, do not, therefore, interfere with the clerical profession in the health of the soul. The quack in Theology ranks no higher than the Medical Empiric.

Permit me, before I close, to tender you in the name of the Professors, their thanks for your attention to your studies, your invariable gentlemanly bearing and deportment, and to expect their great satisfaction with your daily and last examination.

And in your name permit me to tender thanks to the troops of friends who have this day welcomed by their presence and countenance, the honor conferred upon you, and to none more, to none so much, as to the better and best half of human nature.